

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is a cancer cluster?**

A cancer cluster is defined as a greater-than-expected number of cancer cases that occurs within a group of people in a defined geographic area over a specified period of time. When people learn that several friends, family members, or neighbors have found out they have cancer, cancer clusters are often suspected. Cancer clusters are also sometimes suspected when people who work at the same place or have other factors in common get cancer.

### **What are the criteria for a group of cancer cases to be considered a cluster?**

To be a cancer cluster, a group of cancer cases must meet the following criteria:

- Includes a large number of cases of one type of cancer or types of cancer scientifically proven to have the same cause or etiology, rather than several different cancer types.
- The observed number of cases is higher than one would typically observe in a similar setting, e.g. in a group with a similar population, age, race, or gender.

Other important factors in evaluating reports of cancer clusters are:

- A rare type of cancer, rather than common types.
- An increased number of cases of a certain type of cancer in an age group that is not usually affected by that type of cancer.
- The type of cancer involved is a primary (original) cancer not a metastasized (spread from another organ) cancer.

### **How are suspected cancer clusters investigated?**

Not all community concerns of excess cancer require investigation; oftentimes, community concerns can be resolved by providing general cancer educational information, facts, and resources.

When needed, a local or state health department gathers information about the suspected cancer cluster. This commonly includes the types of cancer, number of cases, age, sex, race, address, and age at diagnosis of the individuals with cancer. The Department of Health (Department) reviews this available information and determines if analysis of cancer rates and other investigative steps are needed to better understand the situation.

If the Department determines that analysis is needed, this involves confirming the number and types of cancers in the community and comparing this to what might be expected based on state or county rates of cancer. Specific analysis (such as investigating just childhood rates, or just among women in the case of breast cancer) may also be needed depending upon the type of concern. The Department communicates and discusses the results of the analysis with the community.

### **Where do I go for additional information?**

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Cancer Clusters](#)
- [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry](#)
- [National Cancer Institute \(NCI\) Cancer Clusters](#)

### **What is FCDS (Florida Cancer Data System)?**

The FCDS is Florida's statewide cancer surveillance system. The FCDS is legislatively mandated to collect incidence data on all cancers diagnosed in Florida per section 385.202, Florida Statutes. The FCDS has been collecting the number of new cancers diagnosed each year statewide since 1981. The FCDS is used to observe cancer trends and provide a research base for studies into the possible causes of cancer.

### **What kind of cancer cases must be reported to FCDS?**

Florida Statutes require all malignant cancers reportable with the following *exceptions* - In situ carcinoma of the cervix (CIS), intraepithelial neoplasia grade III of the cervix (CIN III) and intraepithelial neoplasia of the prostate (PIN III) are not reportable. Basal and squamous cell carcinoma of non-genital skin sites are not reportable regardless of extent of disease at the time of diagnosis or the date of first contact with the reporting facility. Reportable on or after diagnosis date of January 1, 2001, are Intraepithelial neoplasia Grade III of vulva (VIN III), vagina (VAIN III) and anus (AIN III) and Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS). All patients with an active, benign or borderline brain or central nervous system (CNS) tumor, diagnosed on or after January 1, 2004, whether being treated or not are reportable. All cancer cases diagnosed and/or treated in Florida since 1981 must be reported to the FCDS.

### **What kind of data are collected?**

The FCDS requires that the data collected include information which indicates diagnosis, stage of disease, medical history, patient demographics, laboratory data, tissue diagnosis, and methods of diagnosis or treatment for each cancer diagnosed or treated in Florida. The FCDS does not collect environmental exposure data, genetic information, and residency history.

### **Who is required to report cancer cases to FCDS?**

All facilities licensed under Chapter 395, Florida Statutes, and each freestanding radiation therapy center under section 408.07; all ambulatory surgical centers as specified by Florida Administrative Code rule 64D-3.034; any licensed practitioner in the state of Florida that practices medicine, osteopathic, chiropractic medicine, naturopathy, or veterinary medicine are required to report under Chapter 381, Florida Statutes, or any laboratory licensed under Chapter 483, Florida Statutes, that diagnoses or suspects the existence of a cancer.